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THE
IMPORTANCE OF RIGHT SENTIMENTS

CONCERNING

THE PERSON OF CHRIST;

A SERMON,

PREACHED AT

ESSEX CHAPEL, APRIL 10, 1806,

BEFORE THE LONDON UNITARIAN SOCIETY, FOR
PROMOTING CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE AND
THE PRACTICE OF VIRTUE BY THE
DISTRIBUTION OF BOOKS.

BY

THOMAS BELSHAM.

Non, quia semel erratum est, ideo semper errandum esse.

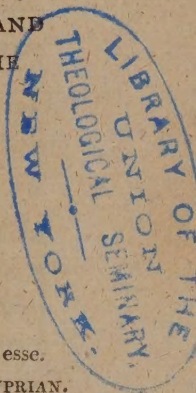
CYPRIAN.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR J. JOHNSON, ST. PAUL'S CHURCHYARD,

By R. Taylor and Co., 38, Shoe-Lane, Fleet-Street.

1806.



A SERMON.

1 COR. VIII. 6, 7.

TO US THERE IS BUT ONE GOD, THE FATHER,
OF WHOM ARE ALL THINGS, AND WE IN HIM;
AND ONE LORD, (*master*) JESUS CHRIST, BY
WHOM ARE ALL THINGS, AND WE BY HIM.
HOWBEIT, THERE IS NOT IN EVERY MAN THAT
KNOWLEDGE.

AN eminent divine of the established church in the last century, the celebrated Dr. Whitby, a learned and laborious commentator upon the christian scriptures, after having been for the greater part of life an able and a zealous advocate for the popular doctrine of the Trinity, upon more mature deliberation changed his sentiments as he advanced in years; and, with a candour and magnanimity truly exemplary, he drew up a retraction of his error, which he intended to publish, which however he did not live to print, but which he expressly ordered to

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be given to the public after his decease. He begins with confessing, that "when he wrote his Commentaries, he went on too hastily in the common beaten road of other reputed orthodox divines. But I own," says he, "that I am not able to resist the shining evidence of truth, nor am I ashamed to confess my former mistakes and errors in these matters after such strong and irresistible conviction. And this my retraction," continues this truly honest and ingenuous ecclesiastic, "after all my former endeavours to assert and establish a contrary doctrine, deserves the more to be considered, because it proceeds, and indeed can proceed, from me for no other reason but purely from the strong and irresistible convictions which are now upon me that I was mistaken. Nothing but the love of truth can be supposed to extort such a retraction from me, who, having already lived so long beyond the common period of life," being then upwards of fourscore, "can have nothing else to do, but to prepare for my great change: and in order thereunto, to make my peace with God and my own conscience before I die. To this purpose I solemnly appeal to the searcher of hearts, and call God to witness, whether I have hastily or rashly departed from the common opinion, or, rather, whether I have not deliberately and calmly weighed the arguments on both sides, drawn from scripture and antiquity*."

Such was the declaration of this honest and vene-

* See Dr. Whitby's Preface to his Last Thoughts.

rable man, and such the testimony which he thought it his duty to bear to what he judged to be christian truth, after having devoted the labour of a long life to the pursuit of it. And I trust that I shall not be severely censured, if, following the example of this faithful confessor, in my humble measure I bear my grave and repeated testimony against what appear to me, after long and serious inquiry, to be the prevailing corruptions of the christian doctrine concerning the person of Jesus Christ : nor can it be thought irrelevant to the present occasion to spend a few moments in illustrating the reasonableness of the inquiry, and the importance of the subject. We shall thus learn whether those great and good men, who from time to time have entered their solemn protest against popular errors, who have devoted their lives to the instruction and reformation of the church, and to whose faithful and undaunted efforts in the midst of difficulties and dangers we stand indebted for all the light and knowledge we enjoy, are to be approved or condemned for their generous and active zeal ; and whether *we* are employing that time to valuable purpose which we dedicate to the acquisition of christian truth, and to the correction of long-established error. This information is the more to be desired, as there are many who from indifference, from indolence, or from some other cause, declining to interest themselves in these inquiries, are willing to satisfy their minds with the notion that these subjects are of no importance,

and that the acquisition of christian knowledge is of little practical value.

To justify the exertions which others have made, and which I am desirous to recommend to every serious believer in the christian revelation, to obtain correct information concerning the person of Christ, I shall endeavour to demonstrate, first, that the question itself is of very considerable importance; secondly, that the solution of it is attended with some difficulty; and thirdly, that nevertheless complete satisfaction may be attained by those who are disposed to inquire seriously and impartially into the evidence of the case.

In the first place, some persons delight in representing this controversy as relating to a mere speculative opinion, meaning thereby, that the question concerning the person of Christ is of no practical importance, and consequently, that it is of no use to discuss it. And it must be acknowledged that a man, whether he be a trinitarian, an arian, or a unitarian, whether he be a tritheist, a sabellian, or a socinian, may be honest, temperate, and benevolent; he may be true to his word, faithful to his engagements, just and honourable in his transactions; he may be a good father, a good husband, a good friend, a good neighbour, a good magistrate, a good subject, and a good citizen:—and so he may, if he be a heathen, a mahometan, or an atheist. But shall we then say that christianity, and even theism, is a mere speculative question, and of no practical value? God forbid!

As christians, we believe that the religion of Jesus contains a correct code of moral and religious duty, and offers the most powerful motives to the practice of virtue. Christianity inculcates the love of God as well as the love of our neighbour, and the love of our neighbour as founded in, and fortified by, the love and fear of God. But common sense will teach us, that in order to secure the benefits of the christian religion it is of the utmost importance that we should distinctly understand its nature and design. We must study the doctrines and discoveries of the christian revelation, that we may learn to obey its precepts, to be governed by its motives, and to be elevated by its hopes.

It is the opinion of the bulk of professed christians that Jesus Christ, the founder of our holy religion, is the second person in a supposed trinity of divine persons, and that he is God independent on and equal with the Almighty Father. It is the opinion of others that Jesus is not indeed Supreme God, but a derived or created being, to whom all communicable attributes have been imparted by the Supreme, and who has been delegated by God to the high office of creating, sustaining, and governing the universe, or, which to every practical purpose is nearly the same, of the solar system, or of this world in which we dwell. Others are believers in the simple pre-existence of Christ ; while some, who constitute I fear a very small proportion of the general body of believers, regard Jesus Christ

as a man in all respects similar to other men, only so far as he was distinguished from the rest of his brethren by divine communications, and is the greatest of all the prophets of God. Now can any one seriously maintain that these are mere speculative differences, questions of no practical value? If Jesus be God, is he not to be worshiped as God? If he be an inferior and delegated maker, is he not to be acknowledged as such? And if he be a prophet, is he not to be honoured as a prophet? I can never believe that it is a question of no importance to ascertain whether that Jesus whom we all agree to own and reverence as our Master, is a prophet or an angel, or a super-angelic being, or a god.

1. The determination of this question will clear away the rubbish of much useless controversy. If we are once well and firmly settled in the true scriptural notion concerning the great apostle and high priest of our profession, that he is a man, and nothing more than a man, approved of God by signs and miracles, and gifts of the holy spirit, we instantly put a stop to all those nice and subtle questions to which erroneous conceptions concerning his person have given birth, and which have for ages divided and distracted the christian world. It is no longer a topic of debate whether the son be a self-existent, self-subsistent being, or a necessary emanation from the Father as the fountain of godhead; whether the distinction of persons in the divine essence be real or modal; how it is possible that three divine persons

should each of them possess every attribute of godhead so as to be absolute and perfect God, and yet that there should not be three gods but one God ; how the first person of the trinity can send his equal, the second person of the trinity, into the world to be born and die ; how the eternal God can become a helpless infant, and expire upon a cross ; how a being can exist who is neither created nor uncreated ; how the Supreme God can delegate his power of forming and governing the universe to a creature ; how the supposed perfections of the Logos can become quiescent in a human body :—These questions and a thousand others which have tortured the wit and subtlety of men for seventeen centuries past, and which have often proved the occasion of fierce controversy and bloody persecution, are entirely superseded by the scripture doctrine of the proper humanity of Jesus Christ. This doctrine also puts a stop to all the intricate and angry controversies concerning what is called the atonement and satisfaction of Christ. For though some, who admit the proper humanity of Jesus Christ, do nevertheless plead for the doctrine of atonement in an obscure and qualified sense ; yet the doctrine which they defend bears no relation nor resemblance to that mysterious and sublime speculation which the trinitarians contend for, who maintain that the Son appeased the anger of the Father, by suffering, either in quantity or value, the full amount of what the elect would have endured ; nor even, to the less revolting but not better founded opinion, that the death of Jesus was an ex-

hibition of the evil nature and evil desert of sin ; or that it was the great act of filial obedience, which was rewarded by the recovery of all mankind from the dominion of death. It is also evident that just notions concerning the person of Christ completely silence the celebrated controversy concerning general and particular redemption, or, in other words, whether the benefits of the death of Christ extend to all mankind, or belong to the elect only. In short, the doctrine of the simple humanity of Jesus Christ reduces the christian religion from a system of abstruse metaphysical jargon, to the standard of common sense ; to a system of plain practical truth, equally intelligible and useful to persons of the meanest and of the highest capacity. It at once puts a stop to all those controversies which are really speculative, and useless, and endless, and leaves nothing but what is solid, substantial, and of the highest importance.

2. Just notions concerning the person of Christ relieve the mind from much painful embarrassment.

A practical trinitarian must always be in an uneasy state of mind. It is impossible that his ideas and his feelings should not be in continual confusion between the notions of one God and of three. Two perfect beings must be perfectly similar, and the ideas of them must be absolutely coincident, and indivisible. But trinitarians do not attend to this ; and in their distinctions between the Father and the Son, they assign to the Father all the stern and terrible attributes of deity, and to the Son all the milder glories of the di-

vine nature. The Father engrosses all their fear, and the Son all their love. This appears to be in fact the case, however they may deny it in words, and endeavour to disguise their feelings, and to impose upon themselves. A similar embarrassment pervades all their acts of religious worship, in which addresses are sometimes made to the Father only; sometimes to the Son only; sometimes to both, and sometimes to the whole trinity. So that their acts of worship are scenes of confusion and perplexity, and at the close of the service their minds are often troubled lest they should not have paid due respect, in a proportionate degree, to each of the divine persons. The same perplexity in an inferior degree takes place upon the Arian system. If Jesus be indeed the Lord our maker, though he be a delegated lord, and a deputed maker, yet surely reason and equity require that some homage should be paid to him. Nor has this been disputed by Arians themselves till very lately; and I think that few serious persons who hold this doctrine can be satisfied without offering some aspirations of gratitude to a benefactor to whom they are so much indebted, and without breathing out some ejaculations of worship, without tendering some humble suit, to a friend so willing and powerful, and who is always at hand. And yet the declaration of Jesus is decisive, "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve."

Now all this painful embarrassment of mind, into which, perhaps, no person can fully enter who has not himself experienced it in some degree, is com-

pletely obviated and removed, by a rational and firm belief in the unity of God, and in the proper humanity of Jesus Christ. We, who are in this strict and proper sense Unitarians, entertain the highest idea of the character of our great Master ; we venerate him as our prophet ; we seek instruction from him as our teacher ; we bow to his authority ; we look to him as our example ; we hope for his salvation ; we triumph in the expectation of being with him where he is. But we worship him not. All our religious homage is addressed to that Great Being to whom Jesus taught us to address it, and to whom he addressed his own, to his Father and our Father, to his God and our God.

3. Right views concerning the person of Christ preclude many objections against the christian religion, and tend to facilitate its reception in the world.

Weak and unthinking men may be attached to mystery, and unintelligible notions may for a time gain the advantage over plain truth ; but this triumph cannot be permanent, for " Great is the Truth, and it will prevail."

In an age so enlightened as the present, persons of sense and reflection will not embrace a religion loaded with mysteries and contradictions. Whatever professions, policy or fashion may induce them to make, there will be no sincere assent of the understanding, no cordial subjection of the will, no active and enlightened zeal for the cause. A doctrine, to secure the assent of the judicious and discerning, must be rational and simple. And the opinions of the en-

lightened part of mankind are of the utmost importance ; for those opinions, though slow in their progress, will gradually become the creed of the vulgar.

The subtle doctrines which now pass for christianity, though they have no just pretensions to that honourable distinction, were at first forged in the schools of philosophy, and the great body of plain unlettered christians long and vehemently remonstrated against them. But subtlety and power, in these instances, established error in opposition to truth. The times are now more enlightened. Men cannot go backward in knowledge as they formerly did. And when knowledge and numbers are combined in favour of truth, it will obtain an easy and a permanent triumph.

But the doctrine of the trinity, and its various appendages, are insuperable objections to thinking and serious persons against the truth of the christian religion. While these doctrines are regarded as essential to christianity, judicious and reflecting persons will never believe that the christian doctrine can be derived from God. A religion which is intended for rational beings must itself be rational : and no other can proceed from the God of truth.

Even Arianism, though it cannot perhaps be proved to involve a contradiction, will nevertheless give rise to many weighty objections in a considerate mind. It is hard to believe without evidence much more satisfactory than any which has hitherto been, or that can be produced, that God should delegate to

any creature, the power of creating and the office of governing the universe, reserving to himself no character but that of a mere spectator. And that such a mighty agent as the Logos should become the feeble tenant of a human body, is scarcely less incredible than the incarnation, as it is called, of Deity itself.

I will add, that Arianism even in its lowest state, asserting nothing more than simple pre-existence, constitutes in the judgment of many thoughtful persons a very serious objection to the divine origin of the christian religion. The mission of a supposed angelic spirit into the world, and his incarceration in a human body, for no purpose, that appears, but what might have been at least equally well accomplished by the mission of a human being, as it is totally different from the whole analogy of nature, seems also repugnant to the wisdom of God, which, it is reasonable to believe, will never employ pompous and supernatural means to produce an effect which might be brought to pass by a simple and natural process. This scheme therefore can never be admitted by a judicious and well-informed inquirer, but upon evidence the most clear and unequivocal.

But that a human being should be selected from the mass of mankind to recover his offending brethren to the knowledge of God, and truth, and duty, and to confirm and exemplify the doctrine of a future immortal existence by his own resurrection from the grave, is a dispensation altogether worthy of the wisdom and benevolence of the Supreme Being.

It is perfectly rational, simple, and credible, and such as a man of understanding and reflection may admit and avow without a blush.

I do not, however, mean to affirm, even upon the proper Unitarian scheme, that revelation is completely clear of every difficulty. No moral truth is so. But the christian revelation is certainly less encumbered with mystery and doubt upon this plain and simple scheme than upon any other. And upon this ground it may justly challenge the very serious and attentive regard of every one who is in earnest in his inquiries after moral and religious truth.

Having thus established the fact, that it is of high importance to attain just conceptions concerning the person of Christ, I now proceed to remark,—

Secondly, That the settlement of this question is attended with considerable difficulty. Not that I think there would be much difficulty in acquiring a just notion concerning the person of Christ, if the scriptures alone were consulted, and if the mind were free from every undue bias. But, unfortunately, the understandings of the generality of christians are so distorted by early prepossessions as to be, in a manner, blind to the light of truth. Christ is so plainly and uniformly represented throughout his history as a human being, that I cannot but believe that an untaught, unprejudiced, and attentive reader would never have suspected the humble prophet of Nazareth to be any other than a man like other men, invested indeed with great powers for some very important and benevolent purposes. But that in the

present state of things there is real and considerable difficulty in impressing the minds of the bulk of professing christians with just and rational views upon this subject, is evident from the erroneous opinions which so generally prevail; and these difficulties originate principally in the following sources.

1. Prejudice. The great mass of christians are educated from childhood in the belief that Jesus Christ is really and truly God as well as man: and that they who call this mystery in question shall without doubt perish everlastingly. And these erroneous opinions concerning the person and offices of Christ, the nature of his undertaking, the obligations they are under to him, and the religious homage which he claims, are so interwoven into their whole system and habit of thinking, that to give up the deity of Christ is, in their estimation, to give up christianity itself, to strip it of all its glorious peculiarities, to forfeit all its hopes, and to incur its severest condemnation. Prejudices like these must necessarily close the eye against the strongest light.

2. Self-interest. To many persons the belief of the various articles of the popular creed, and particularly of the pre-existence, the deity, the incarnation, and the atonement of Christ, is a source of much emolument. If they give these speculations up, and act consistently with their principles, their gains are gone. And this is a consideration which imperceptibly warps the judgement, and leads it to think favourably of opinions the profession of which is found to be so advantageous. But even where a

profession of popular opinions is not lucrative, a public dereliction of them, and opposition to them, almost universally exposes a person to general odium, to contempt, to suspicion, and to reproach; and few have sufficient strength of mind to dare to be singular in the profession of truth.

3. Indolence. The careful examination of the question, and the correction of inveterate errors, require time and pains. There must be reading, examination, reflection, patient thought, the occupation of many hours which might be more agreeably employed, the practice of much self-denial; and after all it is said there is no adequate benefit, no worldly advantage, no additional respect or influence, no recompense but the consciousness of a faithful performance of duty, and of having exchanged error for truth. And to those who are not lovers of truth, and who do not value it above all price, these motives are too feeble to overcome the natural indolence of the human mind, and the reluctance which men always feel to enter upon and to pursue an investigation which might possibly issue in a revolution of their most sacred principles, and in an entire change in their intellectual habits and feelings.

4. Authority. The whole christian world from the earliest age of the christian religion is said, and is generally believed, to have been united in the doctrine of the pre-existence and even of the divinity of Jesus Christ. The churches of the East and of the West, of Asia, of Africa, and of Europe, the church of Rome and the church of Geneva, the church of

Augsburg, and the church of England, all agree in maintaining the same doctrine : and many, with considerable plausibility, think it highly improbable that all these celebrated churches should be mistaken, and that a few individuals only should be in the right.

The authority likewise of the antient ecclesiastical writers, as well as that of modern divines of great eminence and distinction, is pleaded in defence of the popular doctrine concerning the person of Christ. The names of Justin Martyr, of Tertullian and of Origen, of Athanasius and of Arius, among the antients, and those of Luther and Calvin, of Waterland and Clarke, of Watts and Doddridge, of Chandler and of Price, among the moderns, deservedly carry great weight with them. They were men of high respectability of character, men of talents and men of learning, of diligent inquiry, of inflexible integrity, of ardent piety, who took unwearied pains in studying the scriptures, who directed their inquiries to this subject in particular, and who all concurred in the belief that the pre-existence of Christ, and most of them, that his supreme divinity is plainly taught in the christian scriptures ; and that by his own, or by a delegated power, he was the maker, supporter, and governor of the world, and as such entitled to religious homage. Authorities of this kind sometimes possess such a commanding influence, that christians, forgetful of the precept of their great teacher to call no man master upon earth, hardly think themselves at liberty to dissent from them, or to entertain a doubt concerning the truth

of a doctrine which has received the sanction of such venerable names.

5. Argument. While I contend that the general strain of the scriptures is clearly in favour of the proper humanity of Jesus Christ, it is in vain to deny that there are some passages which, detached from their connexion, would appear to a superficial reader, warped by his prepossessions, and ignorant of Jewish phraseology, to wear a different aspect, and to countenance the pre-existence and even the divinity of Christ. And they have been so long applied in that manner, that every other interpretation appears forced and unnatural. These arguments make considerable impression upon the minds of the generality of readers, who are not accustomed to reflect and compare, who judge of the meaning of a text by the mere sound of the words, who are averse to scripture criticism, and who think no interpretations natural which are not to themselves usual.

Having thus stated the principal sources of those difficulties which occur in the solution of the much-agitated question concerning the person of Christ, I proceed to observe,

Thirdly, That these difficulties may by care and diligence be surmounted, and complete satisfaction may be attained.

They have been actually surmounted by many whose earliest and most cherished prepossessions have been in favour of the popular belief. There have even been some who, like the virtuous and learned confessor whose name I have already men-

tioned, having long been the active able champions of the prevailing doctrine, but still keeping their minds open to conviction, have not been able to resist the shining light of evidence, and though late in life have sacrificed inveterate prejudices upon the altar of Truth.

Nor is great sagacity, nor profound learning, nor acute metaphysical subtlety, in any degree necessary for the attainment of satisfactory information upon this subject. The inquiry involves no abstruse speculation, and little or no literary discussion. The question is concerning a plain matter of fact, whether the founder of the christian religion was a human being, or of an order superior to mankind. And this fact is to be ascertained by evidence of which the plain unlettered christian, with a sound understanding, and an honest heart, is as competent to judge as a man of the most splendid talents, and the highest literary reputation. They who tell us that the question concerning the person of Christ is involved in deep learning, and recondite speculation, are either ignorant persons who have not studied the subject, or indolent persons who are desirous of saving themselves trouble, or dishonest persons who are afraid lest the truth, which it is their interest and wish to conceal, should be generally divulged. Why should the scriptures be more difficult to be understood than any other book of equal antiquity? Why should the testimony concerning the person of Christ be less intelligible or satisfactory than the same kind of evidence with respect to

any other matter of fact? And that it is not so, is apparent from the circumstance that many unlearned christians, of plain understandings and inquisitive minds, have, by the study of the scriptures only, and without consulting books of theological controversy, attained to just sentiments concerning the person of Christ.

And how is this satisfaction to be attained? I answer, Not solely, nor chiefly, by reading books of controversy: for theological disputants, like all others, soon grow warm upon the subject, and the christian spirit, if not the proper view of the question, is too often lost in personal altercation. Though, after all, controversy has its use, and the impartial inquirer after truth will easily see, amidst the acrimony of the contending parties, on which side the argument lies. Nevertheless, the best way to learn the doctrine of the scriptures is by studying the scriptures themselves, by reading them deliberately and repeatedly in their proper order and connexion, by comparing one passage with another, the text with the context, passages which are obscure with those which are clear, and thus making the scripture its own interpreter; at the same time occasionally consulting and comparing approved and judicious commentaries and observations. This must be a serious and continual employment. No good is to be expected from reading the scriptures in a formal, cursory, and superficial manner.

Particular attention must be paid to those passages upon which the erroneous doctrines which have been entertained concerning the person of

Christ principally lean for support. That the general strain of at least three of the gospels, and the Acts of the Apostles, is in favour of the proper humanity of Jesus Christ, I believe none will dispute. The argument for the pre-existence and divinity of Christ rests upon detached passages from mystical discourses contained in the gospel of John, and upon some figurative expressions in the epistles of Paul. These texts, when carefully examined, will be found to contain nothing inconsistent with that judgement concerning the person of Christ, which we should be led to form from the general tenor of the christian scriptures.

When, by these means, conviction has been obtained, in order to retain it in the mind, and to secure the acquiescence of the affections in the judgement of the understanding, so that faith may become a practical principle, the argument must be kept constantly in sight; and for this purpose it must be frequently reviewed. There are some who, when they hear evidence and are convinced by it, soon forget it all, and their old habits of thinking and states of feeling continually recur. They are, as the apostle James expresses it, like the man who beholds his natural face in a mirror; for he beholdeth himself, and goeth away and immediately forgetteth what manner of man he was. This happens principally to persons who acquire new views of divine truth after they are advanced in life, whose habits of thinking and states of feeling are more fixed and less capable of undergoing a material change, than those of persons in earlier life. Arguments, therefore, in

order to be properly felt and to produce their practical effect, must be kept constantly in view. And in due time, not suddenly but gradually, the feelings of the heart will follow the dictates of the understanding.

Be not too much influenced by human authority. If there be great names on one side, there are names equally great on the other. Not to mention those early teachers of the proper humanity of Christ at the æra of the Reformation from popery, whose expositions of the scripture were the admiration of the age in which they lived ; in later times the authority of Sir Isaac Newton, and of his intimate friend and fellow-labourer Hopton Haynes, also of Dr. Lardner and Dr. Jebb, will surely weigh in the balance against a multitude of others. These were the decided advocates of the proper Unitarian doctrine. Many eminent characters lately deceased, and others who are still living, might with great propriety be mentioned in this connexion. But these will naturally occur to your own recollection. They need not my testimony, and are above my praise. But in cases of importance, where we possess the means of information, it is our duty to inquire and to judge for ourselves, and not to rely upon the judgement of others. The authority of great names may justly teach modesty, forbearance, and mutual candour ; but they are not to overrule the judgement in opposition to evidence.

I may, perhaps, be thought by some to have insisted more upon this subject than it is entitled to by its intrinsic value. In reply, I must appeal to

what I have already urged concerning the importance of correct notions of the person of Christ in the process of this discourse. I may also add, that I have myself had some experience of the different effects of the popular and of the rational system of christianity. The former I have invariably found to be a source of perplexity, of anxiety, of despondency, and gloom: the latter is a never-failing spring of peace and satisfaction, of consolation and of triumph. And I cannot but wish that those upright and pious minds, which are still bowed under the yoke of prejudice and error, might be brought into the light of reason and truth, and might enjoy the comfort of that liberty with which Christ has made us free.

From what has been said I trust that you will see it to be a duty of universal and indispensable obligation, to use the best means and opportunities for gaining information upon this interesting subject, and of communicating that information to others. I trust that you are convinced that they are not losing their time, nor misemploying their faculties, who are either inquiring themselves, or are instructing others, in the true doctrine of the scriptures concerning the person of Christ.

It was a deep impression of the great importance of bearing a grave and public testimony to the fundamental doctrine of the absolute and unrivalled supremacy of the ONE GOD even the FATHER, and to the proper humanity of Jesus Christ, and of entering a solemn and unequivocal protest against the popular corruptions of the christian religion, which

induced a small number of friends to truth and rational christianity, fifteen years ago, to associate together for the purpose of holding up to public view what they deemed to be the leading principles of christian doctrine, purified from popular error; and to promote christian knowledge by the distribution of books. The principal objects of this society are distinctly set forth in the preamble to its Rules. It is there explicitly declared, "That the fundamental principles of the society are, that there is but **ONE** **GOD**, the sole former, supporter, and governor of the universe, the **ONLY** proper object of religious worship; and that there is one mediator between God and man, the **MAN** Christ Jesus, who was commissioned by God to instruct men in their duty, and to reveal the doctrine of a future life."

This society, which has no covert and sinister views, which has nothing that it wishes to conceal, which thus openly professes its object and design, which possesses and desires no means of accomplishing its purposes but those of calm dispassionate reasoning, and of appeal to the authority of the scriptures critically and judiciously interpreted, which scorns to avail itself of popular prejudice, and which asks no support but from the lovers of christian truth; this society, which justly claims the honourable distinction of Unitarian, has been from its first institution in the year 1791, incessant in its endeavours to promote its main design; it has spent upwards of two thousand five hundred pounds in printing and distributing tracts for the diffusion of christian knowledge, and the promoting virtuous prac-

tice ; and it may surely hope that these exertions have not been altogether in vain. The generous example has stimulated others in different parts of the kingdom to institute similar societies for the same important purposes, with very considerable, and I trust, growing success. Many of the early friends and original supporters of this society are now no more, and others, either now are, or soon will be, laid aside from further service. But we trust that the cause will not suffer in the hands of the rising generation of Unitarians. And it is with great satisfaction that we witness the warm and honourable zeal with which many young persons are animated in its support. Go on, my young friends, in your generous career ; and if you cannot surpass some of your predecessors in love to truth, and in zeal for its promulgation, God grant that you may abundantly exceed us in talent, in exertion, in acceptance, and success ! Our cause is glorious. Its ultimate success is sure. The means by which its final triumph will be accomplished are unknown. It is an unspeakable honour to be embarked in a service in which we co-operate with God and Christ, and with the wisest and best men in all ages. No one can tell how far his individual exertions may be made instrumental to the diffusion of truth and virtue, and to the improvement and happiness of mankind. But of this we are assured, and let the glorious assurance animate our active and persevering exertions, that no effort, no pious generous effort in the cause of truth and virtue and real christianity shall ultimately be lost.

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